

**Remarks for Ambassador Beyrle  
USAID/Bulgaria Closing Event - October 10, 2007, 4:00 p.m.  
Kempinski Hotel Zografski, Sofia, Bulgaria**

Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, Acting Administrator Fore, distinguished guests, and friends.

It is a great honor to be in this hall today, addressing so many of you who have had a direct hand in writing the history of the Republic of Bulgaria. Today we are celebrating everything that you have accomplished during that time: the literal transformation of a political and economic system, the re-establishment of a fully sovereign and independent European nation, the rebirth of hope and opportunity among a people whose civilization is as old as Europe itself. In 1872, Vasil Levski made a prediction: “To be equal to other European nations depends only on our united strength.” More than a century of promise and disappointment would pass, but it is clear today that Levski’s prophecy is nearly fulfilled. And I believe that the many of the Bulgarians whose united strength made his words come true are in this room today.

My respect and appreciation for what you have accomplished is deeply felt, and even emotional, because I recall vividly from where you started on this unprecedented journey. As a young American diplomat in 1985, I saw the wasted potential and the unfulfilled dreams of Bulgaria. I saw the beauty of the land and its people, and untapped intellectual and entrepreneurial capital. Bulgaria seemed to me like a country in a straitjacket. And – like all of us here today – I asked myself, could it ever be different?

And then, in the kind of epochal change that few in the course of history are privileged to witness during their lives, the world was transformed beneath our feet. The changes came so rapidly that, in the words of Vaclav Havel, “we had literally no time even to be astonished.” We could only dedicate ourselves to doing all we could to ensure that what seemed so fragile and temporary should become strong and lasting. And so we set to work: Americans, motivated by the desire to create a balance of power in favor of freedom and democracy; and Bulgarians, eager to fulfill the prophecy of Levski and enjoy the blessings and fruits of a re-united Europe.

Today, we can look back over that seventeen-year journey with a great sense of satisfaction. The institutions we built and sustained together are monuments to a successful partnership. The National Institute of Justice. The National Association of Municipalities. The American University of Bulgaria. The Bulgarian-American Enterprise Fund, and now, the America for Bulgaria Foundation. Starting sometimes from just the spark of an idea, we have built something of immense value that neither Americans nor Bulgarians could have accomplished without the other’s help and support.

But beyond these durable legacies, and the hundreds of other examples of joint programs and projects, there is a less tangible, but no less important legacy of our seventeen-year assistance partnership: namely, a sense of optimism and a spirit of problem-solving. By nature, we as Americans tend to see no problem as insurmountable. Where there’s a will, there’s a way. And I know that those of you here today share that outlook. You brought your own energy and dedication to addressing some issues over the last seventeen years that might have seemed, in the beginning, impossible.

As a member of NATO and the EU, Bulgaria no longer faces problems on its own. You now are citizens of a great continent and members of a transatlantic partnership, which means you – and we -- play a central role on the world stage. And the problems we will encounter in the decades ahead, like the challenges we faced over the past seventeen years, cannot be solved on our own. We need each other's help.

One of the key issues we prepare to face together is economic security. For Bulgaria, this means raising incomes and employment so that young people have faith in a prosperous and stable future. On a broader scale, it means reducing the income differences between richer and poorer countries, on the European continent and beyond.

Protecting Bulgaria and America against transnational threats will be another of our shared priorities. We will be partners in the fight against terrorism, as well as the global fight against organized crime and its connections to trafficking in drugs and humans. Corruption within Bulgaria's borders remains an issue of deep concern to us. We will support your efforts to root out corruption and strengthen the rule of law.

We will be partners in coping with humanitarian crises, global health threats, and in protecting the environment. Bulgaria as a part of Europe must work together with the United States and other countries to find a solution to global warming and other ecological dangers. Bulgaria has unique natural beauty. Protecting this gift is an important responsibility.

Bulgaria's well deserved reputation as an ethnically diverse and open society can be a model for the rest of Europe. The United States strongly shares those values and we will work with you to maintain and promote tolerance and protection for ethnic minorities.

We share the goal of bringing into the European Community your neighbors in Southeastern Europe, helping them to meet the standards and requirements of EU membership. Bulgaria can and must remain a leader in this effort. You have much to offer in terms of successful examples.

So let us go forward, inspired by what we have accomplished, in a spirit of optimism and readiness to work together. To my American colleagues from USAID, I express my deepest admiration for your embodiment of what makes America a great nation: an unbounded sense of what is possible, and a deep instinct of generosity.

To my Bulgarian friends, I say: Congratulations on all you have built for yourselves and your children. Our work together is not done. But let this celebration renew our energies for what lies ahead.

Thank you.